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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000212

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SUBJECT: ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER ON ELECTIONS, MCA, GOOD GOVERNANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita D. Ragsdale.  
For reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador met with Acting Foreign Minister, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, at her request February 23 to discuss several issues, among them good governance, elections, and Djibouti's quest to become eligible for the Millennium Challenge Account. Youssouf said regarding good governance, Djibouti was concerned on the political side. He said the Government was doing the best it could to develop a political process with a good opposition and with transparent elections. Youssouf discussed at length the opposition and its refusal to participate in upcoming presidential elections in April. He emphasized that the Government had told the opposition from the beginning that its participation and opinions were welcomed. Youssouf also addressed the issues of developing the infrastructure of the political system, government willingness to change, and Djibouti's hope for new ideas from the opposition. End Summary.

12. (C) Regarding good governance, Youssouf said the Government was concerned when it came to the political system. He said Djibouti is trying its best to develop a political process that has a good opposition and transparent elections. The opposition had not declared a candidate. Nonetheless, the Government had information that indicated the opposition coalition, Union for Democratic Alternance (UAD), was preparing the necessary paperwork for its President Ismail Guedi Hared to be declared a candidate. Youssouf continued that at the moment there was only one official opposition candidate, Mohamed Daoud Chehem, who had been kicked out of UAD for his declaration of candidacy. He said he had also been informed of at least one independent candidate. However, up to that point the other candidates had not sent their representatives to the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI).

13. (C) Youssouf noted that the Minister of Interior had appeared on television two nights before requesting the opposition to come verify electoral lists. He said the Minister of Interior wants them to be a part of the CENI. Youssouf emphasized the Government had told the opposition, it was welcome from the beginning to the end of the process. It seemed the opposition was not showing all its cards. He added the Government had requested observers from the United Nations, U.S., European Union, Francophone countries, African Union, and Arab league. He asked "what more can we do than that?" Youssouf stated the lists for candidacy would remain open until one month prior to the election, March 8th.

14. (C) Ambassador commented that Djibouti also had work to do on the infrastructure of its political system. She added in light of its pursuit for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) eligibility, Djibouti would have to integrate its citizens into the process of decision making. Ambassador also noted the interest expressed by MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs, Mohamed Ali Hassan, in opening a dialogue with the Embassy on remedying problems cited in the U.S. Human Rights Report on Djibouti. Youssouf responded the Government is ready and willing to accept suggestions on how to improve Government's practices. He added that the Embassy would find the Government's response to change to be "yes," while the opposition would be those constantly saying "no" to proposals. He described the opposition as very weak and in need of a leader. Youssouf said "You have to keep in mind that all of the opposition leaders have been part of the government at one point in the past." Youssouf then stated the country had gone from bad to worse under these individuals until President Guelleh came to power and everything began to change, slowly, but change nonetheless. Youssouf said that while the Government could be accused of not changing fast enough, it could not be accused of stagnating.

15. (C) Ambassador pointed out the importance of giving citizens, whether opposition or government-allied, a platform from which they could speak their minds and the right to do so without fear of imprisonment. Youssouf responded that in

the realm of elections, once the campaign starts both sides will have equal time allotted on television and radio. He added that citizens can meet at any time, anywhere to discuss their opinions and "we are waiting for their new ideas."

16. (C) Comment: Post believes that there appears to be political desire and political will within the highest ranks of the Government to change the manner in which the administration governs. There does not seem to be a desire or will among the opposition to accept any perspective of the Government other than as persecutor. The opposition is reduced to merely complaining that it is not in power, rather than presenting actual alternatives to Government practices. Embassy has established a Country Team focus group to look more closely at democratization, human rights and Djibouti and to dialogue with the MFA on these and other political integration issues. End Comment.  
RAGSDALE